



Beach HOTLINE

Call the Wisconsin Great Lakes Beach Health Hotline at **800-441-4636, ext. 1460** for a recording of the most recent water quality reports for public beaches along Lake Michigan and Lake Superior. Also dial the hotline to hear recordings that answer many frequently asked questions, such as:

- ✓ Why are some beaches closed?
- ✓ What can I do to protect my family's health at the beach?
- ✓ What are the current Great Lakes public beach monitoring procedures?
- ✓ What can I do to protect Wisconsin's Great Lakes beach health?

Visit our website:
www.wibeaches.com

Call the hotline
800-441-4636 ext. 1460

Contact:
DNR Bureau of
Watershed Management
608-267-7694



Before you go to the beach...

**A guide to
Great Lakes water
quality for Wisconsin
beach visitors**



Protecting Great Lakes water quality and your health

What you can do to help:

Dispose of litter in containers,
especially diapers and pet waste.

Do not feed gulls and waterfowl

Don't enter water if you are ill

Change diapers before allowing
children in water

Do not dump anything in storm
drains

Avoid using excess fertilizers on
your yard

How you can reduce your risk of infection from pathogens:

Don't swallow lake water

Shower after swimming

Wash hands before eating

Water quality at Great Lakes beaches

Going to the beach is one of the most popular summer activities along Wisconsin's Great Lakes coastline. Whether you're there to get a tan, wade the surf or swim, water quality can have an impact on your experience at the beach. This brochure will help you get the information you need to enjoy your time at the beach and safeguard your health.

Testing the waters

Beach water is tested for the presence of bacteria called *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*). While *E. coli* itself poses a minimal health threat to swimmers, it can indicate the presence of other dangerous bacteria and viruses that can cause diseases. Advisory signs are posted if the amount of *E. coli* exceeds standards recommended by the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Sources of disease-causing microorganisms include sewage overflows, polluted storm water runoff, sewage treatment plant malfunctions, illegal boat waste dumping, and malfunctioning septic systems.

Pollution in beach water is often much higher during and immediately after rainstorms because water draining into the beach may carry sewage from overflowing sewage treatment systems. Rainwater also flows to beaches after running off lawns, farms, streets, construction sites, and other developed areas, picking up animal waste, fertilizer, pesticides, trash, and many other pollutants. Many of these pollutants can end up in the water at our beaches.



Look for these signs at Great Lakes public beaches

The green or "good" sign

The green sign indicates that water quality is acceptable for swimming. (Note that some local health departments do not use the green sign, and use only the yellow and red signs.)

The yellow or "caution" sign

The yellow sign indicates an increased risk of illness for visitors who come in contact with the water. This sign is posted when the amount of *E. coli* bacteria in the beach water is higher than US EPA standards. The standard is 235 colony forming units of *E. coli* per 100 milliliters of water. The presence of elevated levels of *E. coli* only indicates that fecal material from humans or other warm-blooded animals might be present. It does not mean disease-causing microorganisms are necessarily present.

The sign remains posted until the next water test shows *E. coli* counts have dropped below the federal standard.

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The red or "closed" sign

The red sign indicates a more serious health risk to people who come into contact with the water. When the amount of *E. coli* in beach water is found to be at very high levels (more than 1,000 colony forming units per 100ml of water), the "Closed" sign is posted and visitors are advised to keep out of the water. The sign may also be posted after events that are associated with increased levels of *E. coli*, such as a sewer overflow or large rainstorms, or under any other circumstances when local health officials determine that the beach should be closed in the interest of public health.

The sign remains posted until conditions improve and/or the next water test shows *E. coli* counts have dropped below this level.